

**STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE IN LEARNING ENGLISH
THROUGH DIGITAL GAME-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING
(DGBLL): A NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

**By
MUHAMMAD RAIHAN FADILLAH**



**ANTASARI STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
BANJARMASIN
2026 AD / 1448 AH**

**STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE IN LEARNING ENGLISH
THROUGH DIGITAL GAME-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING
(DGBLL): A NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

An Undergraduate Thesis

Presented to Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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I, the undersigned, Muhammad Raihan Fadillah, declare that this undergraduate thesis is my original work, gathered and utilized specially to fulfil the purposes and objectives of this study, and has not been previously submitted to any other university for any degree or other purposes. I also declare that the publications cited in this work have been properly acknowledged. If someday, it is proven otherwise, I understand that my degree will be revoked.

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ABSTRACT

Fadillah, Muhammad Raihan. 220101030653. *Students' Experience in Learning English through Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL): A Narrative Inquiry*. Thesis. English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Antasari State Islamic University. Advisor: Dr. Rahmila Murtiana, M.A, 2026.

Keywords: English learning strategies; Digital Game-Based Language Learning; DGBLL; Narrative Inquiry; Digital Games

This study explores students' experiences and English learning strategies through Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL). Using a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry design, this research investigates how students describe their experiences in using digital games for English learning and what strategies they employ to improve their English language skills. Data were collected through observation and interviews with two English Education Department students at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. The findings reveal that digital games created enjoyable, motivating, interactive, and low-pressure learning experiences. Digital games such as Duolingo, Quizizz, Kahoot, Bamboozle, Quizlet, and RPG games helped students develop vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, and communication skills. The students also employed cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies, including guessing meaning from context, using translation tools, repeating exercises, monitoring progress, discussing with friends, managing anxiety, and building confidence. However, several challenges were also found, including technical problems, difficulty understanding English content, and anxiety or competition. This study highlights that digital games are not only used for entertainment, but can also become meaningful learning spaces when students use them actively with appropriate strategies and clear learning goals. The findings offer useful insights for students, lecturers, institutions, and future researchers in integrating Digital Game-Based Language Learning into English language learning.

ABSTRAK

Fadillah, Muhammad Raihan. 220101030653. *Students' Experience in Learning English through Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL): A Narrative Inquiry*. Skripsi. Program Studi Tadris Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan, Universitas Islam Negeri Antasari. Dosen Pembimbing: Dr. Rahmila Murtiana, M.A, 2026.

Kata kunci: Strategi belajar bahasa Inggris; *Digital Game-Based Language Learning; DGBLL; Narrative Inquiry; Digital Games*

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman mahasiswa dan strategi belajar bahasa Inggris melalui *Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL)*. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan desain *narrative inquiry*, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana mahasiswa menggambarkan pengalaman mereka dalam menggunakan digital games untuk belajar bahasa Inggris serta strategi yang mereka gunakan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa Inggris. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan wawancara dengan dua mahasiswa Program Studi Tadris Bahasa Inggris di UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa digital games menciptakan pengalaman belajar yang menyenangkan, memotivasi, interaktif, dan tidak terlalu menekan. Digital games seperti *Duolingo, Quizizz, Kahoot, Bamboozle, Quizlet, dan RPG games* membantu mahasiswa mengembangkan *vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, dan communication skills*. Mahasiswa juga menggunakan strategi kognitif, metakognitif, sosial, dan afektif, seperti menebak makna dari konteks, menggunakan alat penerjemah, mengulang latihan, memantau perkembangan, berdiskusi dengan teman, mengelola kecemasan, dan membangun kepercayaan diri. Namun, beberapa tantangan juga ditemukan, seperti masalah teknis, kesulitan memahami konten bahasa Inggris, serta kecemasan atau kompetisi. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa digital games tidak hanya digunakan sebagai hiburan, tetapi juga dapat menjadi ruang belajar yang bermakna ketika mahasiswa menggunakannya secara aktif dengan strategi yang tepat dan tujuan belajar yang jelas. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan yang bermanfaat bagi mahasiswa, dosen, institusi, dan peneliti selanjutnya dalam mengintegrasikan *Digital Game-Based Language Learning* ke dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.

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CONTENTS

COVER PAGE	i
TITLE PAGE	ii
STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY.....	iii
PLAGIARISM CERTIFICATE	iv
APPROVAL	v
VALIDATION.....	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
<i>ABSTRAK</i>	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ix
CONTENTS.....	xi
LIST OF APPENDICES	xiii
CHAPTER I.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. Background of Study	1
B. Definition of Key Terms	9
C. Research Questions	11
D. Objectives of Study	11
E. Significance of Study.....	11
CHAPTER II.....	13
THEORETICAL REVIEW	13
A. English Learning Strategies	13
B. Digital Game-Based Language Learning.....	21
C. Digital Games as English Learning Media	35
D. Challenges in Digital Game-Based English Learning.....	42
E. Review of Previous Study	48
CHAPTER III	53

RESEARCH METHOD	53
A. Research Design	53
B. Research Setting.....	56
C. Research Participants	57
D. Data	59
E. Technique of Data Collection	60
F. Research Instrument.....	64
G. Data Analysis	67
CHAPTER IV	72
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	72
A. Findings.....	72
B. Discussion.....	99
CHAPTER V	125
CLOSURE	125
A. Conclusion.....	125
B. Suggestions.....	127
REFERENCES.....	129
APPENDICES	136
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	145

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix I Translation of Al-Qur'an	132
Appendix II. Google Form Sheet	133
Appendix III. Observation Sheet	134
Appendix IV. Research Instruments	135
Appendix V. Research Letter	141
Appendix VI. Research Completion Letter	142
Appendix VII. Photograph.....	143
Appendix VIII. Consultation Schedules and Notes.....	144

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Technology has become an integral element of modern life, shaping how people work, interact, and study. It serves not only as a collection of machines or digital devices, but also as a systematic application of knowledge with the goal of effectively solving human issues. In everyday situations, technology allows activities to be accomplished faster and more correctly, saving time and energy. Its applications range from health to industry, economics, and, most notably, education, where it plays an important role in improving the quality and efficacy of learning. According to Anwar et al. (2021), technology is the transformation of knowledge into goods, processes, and services that aim to promote human wellbeing. In educational contexts, technology is defined more generally as the combination of tools, concepts, management systems, and human resources that aid in the learning process.

In the educational sector, technology serves as both a resource and an instructional medium. It makes it easier to organize, administer, and evaluate learning by giving students with organized direction. Computers and digital gadgets may be programmed to guide students through learning tasks in a step-by-step manner, following carefully developed pedagogical concepts. In this approach, technology fills tasks previously held by instructors, such as

directing, encouraging, transferring knowledge, and assessing students' progress. According to Anwar et al. (2021), educational technology is a complex and integrated process that involves people, processes, tools, and ideas with the goal of solving learning difficulties and enhancing educational. As a result, technology does more than just assist teaching; it transforms the learning environment into a more dynamic, efficient, and student-centered system that encourages meaningful learning experiences.

In accordance with these advancements, Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL) is a learning method and instructional technique that uses technology in response to the fact that today's students are intimately familiar with digital worlds. Students nowadays are not passive technology consumers; instead, they actively engage with multiple digital platforms for communication, entertainment, and learning. Digital media, which ranges from online learning platforms to interactive applications, has become an essential component of instructional techniques in both schools and higher education. Many students are already used to digital games in their daily lives, making them a natural and relevant medium for learning. As a result, the incorporation of digital games into language education coincides with students' learning patterns and preferences, allowing instruction to take place in environments that are relevant and engaging to students.

In the evolving field of education, the integration of digital technology has revolutionized teaching methods. Among these innovations, Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL) has emerged as an intriguing approach that fosters active participation and contextual learning experiences. DGBLL has shown its potential in enhancing language skills, particularly in vocabulary retention, grammar understanding, and oral communication skills. It creates immersive environments that motivate students to explore language in ways that traditional methods cannot achieve (Esteban, 2024). However, the practical implementation of DGBLL faces challenges, including a lack of understanding about effective strategies and educators' hesitation to integrate games into classroom teaching (Kucher, 2021).

Despite the growing number of studies on the benefits of DGBLL, there remains a significant gap in understanding how students can effectively design their learning strategies within these environments. Current research primarily focuses on the effectiveness of digital games in language learning or their design principles (Kucher, 2021). Few studies, however, delve into the specific strategies students use to overcome challenges, maximize engagement, and achieve language learning goals. For instance, while motivational theories like Self-Determination Theory and immersive narratives are widely discussed, practical strategies for navigating gamified systems remain underexplored. This

gap limits educators' ability to guide students in leveraging digital games for optimal learning outcomes (Esteban, 2024).

Furthermore, the narrative approach to understanding student strategies in the context of DGBLL is rarely utilized. Most existing studies employ quantitative or experimental methodologies, often overlooking the rich, nuanced experiences of students. To address this gap, this study uses narrative inquiry to explore students' lived experiences, providing insights into the strategies they employ and the challenges they face while engaging with DGBLL (Kucher, 2021). For example, while Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlights the importance of social interaction and collaboration in learning, research is still needed on how these principles manifest in students' strategies when interacting with digital game elements (Kucher, 2021)

This gap becomes increasingly relevant as digital tools in education continue to evolve. Often, students and educators must independently navigate the complexities of DGBLL without clear frameworks or guidelines for effective practice. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the strategies students use to overcome these challenges, supported by evidence from their narratives. In doing so, it builds on existing literature, such as systematic reviews that emphasize the importance of game elements like feedback and immersive narratives but rarely address the student's perspective (Esteban, 2024).

This study provides practical implications for educators and instructional designers, while also contributing to the academic discussion on Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL). A deeper understanding of students' learning processes can support the development of more effective digital games and pedagogical practices, so that DGBLL can be implemented appropriately in language learning contexts. In this study, the use of DGBLL is also connected to the Islamic perspective on the importance of applying suitable methods in delivering knowledge. This idea is reflected in the Qur'an, Surah An-Nahl verse 125, as follows:

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِهِمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ
رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

This verse emphasizes that knowledge should be delivered through wisdom, good instruction, and appropriate communication. In the context of education, this principle suggests that teaching methods need to be carefully selected by considering students' needs, abilities, and learning situations. Therefore, learning is not merely about transferring knowledge, but also about using suitable approaches that allow students to understand the material and engage with it meaningfully.

Based on *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, Quraish Shihab explains that Surah An-Nahl verse 125 contains three important methods: *hikmah*, *mau'izhah hasanah*, and

jidat ahsan. *Hikmah* refers to choosing a wise and appropriate way, *mau'izhah hasanah* refers to delivering good and meaningful instruction, while *jidat ahsan* refers to conducting discussion in the best and most respectful manner (Shihab, 2011). These principles are relevant to DGBLL because digital games can serve as learning media that suit the characteristics of today's students who are familiar with technology. Through digital games, English learning can become more interactive, enjoyable, and student-centered. Thus, the use of DGBLL is not only related to technological innovation, but also reflects the importance of selecting appropriate and meaningful learning methods.

The researcher conducts this study to explore English Education Department students' learning strategies when using Digital Game-Based Language Learning at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. This context was chosen because English Education Department students at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin are becoming more exposed to digital game-based learning tools in their language classes, making it an appropriate setting for investigating how students navigate and benefit from technology-enhanced learning environments.

This research is also based on the researcher's own academic experience as a English Education Department student at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. Prior to participating in the English Education Department, the researcher lacked significant English proficiency and had to start learning the language from

scratch, which included speaking, reading, listening, and writing abilities. Throughout his academic career, from the first to the eighth semester, the researcher saw a variety of lecturers, notably younger professors, who included DGBLL into classroom instruction. Kahoot, Quizizz, and other similar programs were often used, either as formative assessment tools or as icebreaker exercises, to increase student participation.

From the researcher's standpoint, the use of technology, particularly DGBLL, has proved to be both useful and efficient in supporting learning. These technologies made classroom activities more dynamic and pleasant, fostering a learning environment in which students became more responsive to instructional content. Students are more likely to absorb and internalize new information when it is presented in an engaging and pleasurable manner. Furthermore, the introduction of DGBLL enables students to actively communicate with one another, encouraging collaborative learning and making the learning process more meaningful.

Furthermore, DGBLL helps to alleviate the anxiety that is typically linked with foreign language acquisition, particularly during speaking exercises. The game-based learning environment provides a secure area for students to experiment, make errors, and learn without feeling pressured. This state boosts pupils' self-confidence and encourages them to actively utilize English. Furthermore, the quick feedback systems built into many DGBLL platforms

enable students to identify faults and track their progress in real time, making the learning experience more introspective and goal-oriented.

Aside beyond the classroom, the researcher used DGBLL independently on sites like Duolingo. This software provides possibilities to consistently improve language abilities, particularly in English, through organized and gamified learning sessions. Through direct interaction with such technologies, the researcher witnessed personally the significant benefits of digital games in language acquisition. These platforms are especially useful for improving listening, speaking, vocabulary, and grammar abilities, which normally demand a high level of motivation and regular practice.

As a result, the researcher's findings support the notion that digital game-based learning techniques serve not only as supplemental media, but also as facilitators capable of building more flexible, participative, and student-centered learning environments. DGBLL allows for flexible learning, both within and outside of the classroom, while also encouraging students to become more independent and introspective. As a result, researching students' learning processes within DGBLL situations is critical for understanding how this technology might be used most effectively in language instruction.

The goal of this study is to explore how students develop strategies to overcome challenges and maximize their learning outcomes through digital

games, with the aim of enhancing inclusivity and innovation in classroom learning.

B. Definition of Key Terms

1. English Learning Strategies

English Learning Strategies refer to the deliberate techniques, approaches, or actions that students employ to enhance their ability to acquire, practice, and retain English as a second or foreign language. Within the framework of Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL), these strategies encompass the ways students make purposeful use of digital game-based platforms in both classroom and out-of-class learning environments to facilitate their English language development. In this study, English learning strategies are understood as the ways students develop, implement, and modify their learning strategies while participating in DGBLL to enrich their English learning experiences.

2. Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL)

Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL) is an instructional approach that integrates digital games into the process of second or foreign language learning. It combines interactive and engaging game elements with structured educational content to facilitate the development of students' vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills. In this study, DGBLL is viewed not only as a learning medium but also as a learning

environment in which students actively develop, apply, and adapt their own learning strategies to overcome challenges and enhance their language learning outcomes.

In this study, DGBLL is implemented in both classroom and out-of-class settings. Within the classroom, students engage in lecturer-guided game-based learning activities, while outside the classroom they independently utilize digital game-based platforms to reinforce and further develop their English language skills.

DGBLL is commonly implemented through educational platforms such as Kahoot, Quizizz, and Quizlet, which support vocabulary acquisition, grammar practice, and reading comprehension through interactive quizzes, timed activities, and immediate feedback. In addition, Duolingo serves as a gamified mobile application that facilitates systematic English learning through micro-learning tasks, spaced repetition, pronunciation exercises, and adaptive vocabulary and grammar practice. Collectively, these platforms promote learner engagement, reduce language learning anxiety by providing low-risk learning environments, and encourage learner autonomy by enabling students to monitor their progress and repeatedly practice language skills.

This study aims to explore how students of the English Education Department at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin describe their experiences and learning strategies while engaging with DGBLL, providing insights into

the ways they interact with and benefit from game-based language learning environments. The scope of this study is limited to examining students' experiences and English learning strategies in the context of DGBLL implemented both inside and outside the classroom. Accordingly, this research does not investigate the effectiveness of DGBLL in improving language achievement nor compare the educational value of different digital game platforms.

3. Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry is a qualitative research approach that explores individuals' personal stories and lived experiences to gain insights into how they understand and respond to learning processes and challenges. In this study, Narrative Inquiry is used to collect and analyze students' experiences in using Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL), focusing on the strategies they develop to overcome obstacles and enhance their English skills within a game-based environment. The aim of using Narrative Inquiry in this research is to capture authentic, in-depth accounts of students' learning journeys, providing valuable insights into their practical strategies and personal responses to the DGBLL context, which are often overlooked in quantitative studies.

C. Research Questions

1. How do students describe their experiences using digital games for English learning?
2. What English learning strategies do students employ to improve their English language skills while engaging with digital games?

D. Objectives of Study

1. To explore how students describe their experiences using digital games for English learning and how these experiences contribute to their understanding of the learning process.
2. To identify and analyze the English learning strategies employed by students while engaging with digital games to improve their English language skills.

E. Significance of Study

This research aims to give both theoretical and practical benefits :

1. Theoretical Benefits

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL) by exploring the strategies that students use to improve their English language skills. The study highlights the effectiveness of digital games in increasing engagement, reducing language learning anxiety, and supporting the development of core

language skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and communication. By bridging the gap in the existing literature, this study provides new insights into how students utilize digital games to maximize their language learning outcomes. This study was conducted at the UIN Antasari Banjarmasin, focusing on English Education Department students' learning experiences and strategies in a digital game-based learning environment.

2. Practical Benefits

- a. For students, this study provides guidance on effective strategies that can be used to maximize learning outcomes through digital games. This study also encourages students to learn more independently, increase motivation, and utilize digital-based learning environments interactively and optimally.
- b. For future researchers, this study provides a basis for further exploration of DGBLL strategies, providing a narrative framework that can be used to understand different approaches and contexts of digital-based language learning.